

December Senior Sense: Happy Hybrid Holidays!

By Liz O'Donnell

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The “most wonderful time of the year” can be challenging, even under the best of circumstances. Food, family and festivities are supposed to be fun, but often just feel like more work in a family caregiver’s already busy life; caregiving doesn’t take a holiday. Then there are logistical challenges like how to get Dad up the front stairs or how to plan a family gathering around the assisted living or skilled nursing facility schedule. Long-distance caregivers may feel pressure to help their aging parents during a brief and busy visit. And this year, with COVID still very much a part of our lives, but COVID restrictions looser than last holiday season, there’s an added level of stress – deciding the best way to celebrate.

As awful as 2020 was, it was almost easier to know what to do – stay home and stay safe. But this year, we have choices. The [Center for Disease Control](#) has published some guidelines that can serve as a good starting point. They include:

- If you are sick or have symptoms, don’t host or attend a gathering.
- People who have a condition or are taking medications that weaken their immune system may not be fully protected even if they are fully vaccinated and have received an additional dose. They should continue to take all precautions recommended for unvaccinated people, including wearing a well-fitted mask, until advised otherwise by their healthcare provider.
- You might choose to wear a mask regardless of the level of transmission if a member of your household has a weakened immune system, is at increased risk for severe disease, or is unvaccinated.

But even though the options can be overwhelming, they can also be freeing. Last year, we learned how to connect with family and friends virtually. This year, we can still connect that way – if we choose to. Connecting virtually may also allow an immunocompromised family member or someone with mobility issues to join as well. Hybrid celebrations can be a creative, safe and inclusive option for family get togethers. Those who can, and want to, gather. Those who can’t or don’t, can connect via technology like Zoom or Facetime.

If you do choose a hybrid holiday celebration, keep these tips in mind:

- Position cameras so that remote attendees can see holiday decorations
- Be cognizant of background noise and chatter when interacting with someone online
- Low tech options work too. Remember those drive-by birthday parades that were the rage in the spring of 2020? They can be a festive way to deliver some cheer to those who would otherwise be left out of celebrations.

No matter what you plan this year, the most important thing is to keep the spirit of the holiday – however you define it - at the forefront of your planning. For some of us, holidays mean family. For others they mean giving. For others they are about gratitude. They are not about stress, or shopping, or sibling squabbles. So, don't let them become that. Lower your standards. So what if the house is a little messy or the dinner is overcooked or your Dad falls asleep before dinner?

And finally, remember that a holiday are just a day on a calendar. Don't put so much pressure on yourself to make one day so meaningful or even to celebrate this season. If it makes you feel safer or less stressed, you can celebrate any day of the year you choose.

Liz O'Donnell is the founder of [Working Daughter](#) and the author of [Working Daughter: A Guide To Caring For your Aging Parents While Making A Living](#). For caregiving support, information and resources contact a Senior Care Advisor at Care.com. We are master's-level social workers specializing in adult and senior care. Call us today at (855) 781-1303 x3 or email questions to careplanning@care.com



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